

**00741**

**1985/08/29**

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(U) CHINA: OLD SOLDIERS' INFLUENCE LIVES ON

(C/NF) Summary

Deng Xiaoping's military reforms are aimed at reducing the political role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), keeping the PLA on a tight budget, reducing its size to an efficient minimum, and retiring aged and incompetent officers. Recent comments by several senior PLA leaders suggest that Deng's efforts--especially his forced retirement program--continue to be sources of dissatisfaction among veteran Long March officers. A close look at recent appointments in the PLA, however, indicates that the influence of retired leaders lives on through their replacements.

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Lin Biao Revisited

(U) A recent Economic Daily article by Marshal Nie Rongzhen commemorating the 40th anniversary of victory over Japan credited the late Marshal Lin Biao with masterminding China's first major defeat of Japanese troops, the Battle of Pingxiangguan on September 25, 1937. The article said it would distort reality to deny Lin's important role as commander of the 4th Field Army which during the civil war seized the northeast, swept through Beijing and much of central China, and ultimately took control of Guangdong.

(U) Last October, Nie made similar comments in a serialized version of his memoirs, also published in book form. On July 4, former Chief of Staff and currently Permanent Secretary of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission Huang Kecheng called Lin a "noted commander in the history of our army" and said his contributions should not be brushed off.

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Declassify: OADR (multiple sources)

United States Department of State  
Office of FOI, Privacy, & Classification Review  
Review Authority R.H. Miller  
Date: 01/30/96  
Case ID 9403400

Report 1158-AR  
August 29, 1985

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(C) While Lin's reassessment may partly be an attempt by old soldiers to set the record straight, political motivations also may be at work. Deng Xiaoping is attempting to force many of the PLA's elderly generals into retirement, and some of them apparently feel they are being unceremoniously dumped and their contributions given short shrift. Recent comments by party leader Hu Yaobang to a foreign journalist cannot have helped, in view of Deng's efforts to turn over command of the PLA to Hu. In May, Hu said that no new senior generals or marshals would be promoted because candidates lack sufficient "meritorious military service" and that "to tell the truth, there are not a lot of things to do in the Army."

(C) The reassessment of Lin could also be a reaction to Deng's effort to "completely negate the Cultural Revolution." Elderly generals who survived the period without vitriolic public abuse may feel they are being treated unfairly for their failure to oppose Mao and the leftists more forcefully. Several old generals, including Nie, have reminisced about how confusing the 1960s were, how hard it was to tell what the correct political line was, and how psychologically difficult it was to accept that Mao was destroying what they had struggled to build. Nie's memoirs, for example, lauded the actions of Chief of Staff Yang Chengwu, whose tenure spanned the early stages of the radical years. Nie's praise could have been an effort to have Yang reappointed to a high post.

(C) The Nie memoirs, especially the attention paid to the important role played by Ye Jianying, Yang Chengwu, and Nie himself also have served to remind Deng and Hu of the crucial role senior military leaders played in ousting the Gang of Four. Without this contribution, Deng never would have been rehabilitated nor would his reforms have been possible.

(C) Finally, with Lin Biao's role reassessed, the role of his followers tried with the Gang of Four have to be reassessed. Their inclusion in the anti-leftist trial after almost 15 years under arrest has always rankled some senior PLA leaders who may have felt that they made serious mistakes of political judgment but were, after all, simply soldiers following orders of duly constituted superior authority. All of them now are old and sick, and senior PLA leaders may be lobbying for their parole.

Li Desheng: Not Forgotten

(C/NF) Li Desheng, powerful Shenyang Military Region commander for more than a decade, was retired in June, but there are signs that his influence will long outlast him. At least eight recently appointed high-ranking military officials at the center and in key regions are connected with Li. Moreover, Li is rumored

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to be in line for appointment as president of a new national defense institute that would train senior military leaders. So far, however, he shows no indication of leaving "retirement" in the northeast nor is he expected to retire from the Politburo at the September party representatives meeting.

(C/NF) The decision to retire Li--and the compromises Li apparently achieved with Deng to effect it--probably were made during a Spring Festival meeting of top military leaders in south China. In the past, Li has usually spent Spring Festival in Shenyang; this year he traveled to the Vietnam border with Hu Yaobang, Yang Shangkun, and Yu Qiuli. These leaders almost certainly met with Deng, Yang Dezhi, and other top officials vacationing in or near Guangzhou. The decisions were announced internally at the June Military Commission meeting but are only now becoming publicly known.

(S/NF) One of the apparent concessions by Deng and other military leaders was the promotion of a number of Li's former subordinates. So far, at least eight such figures can be identified:

- Deputy Chief of Staff Xu Huizi, formerly of the 39th Army, Shenyang Military Region;
- Deputy Chief of Staff He Qizong, formerly of the 39th Army, Shenyang Military Region;
- General Logistics Department Deputy Director Zhao Nanqi, formerly of the Jilin Military District and Yanbian Autonomous Zhou, Shenyang Military Region;
- Lanzhou Military Region Commander Zhao Xianshu, formerly Deputy Commander, Shenyang Military Region;
- Guangzhou Military Region Political Commissar Zhang Zhongxian, formerly Deputy Director, Political Department, Shenyang Military Region;
- Nanjing Military Region Political Commissar Fu Kuiqing, a former Political Commissar, 23d Army, Shenyang Military Region;
- Shenyang Military Region Commander Liu Jingsong, a former Li Desheng subordinate in Shenyang Military Region; and
- Shenyang Military Region Political Commissar Liu Zhenhua, who retains his position.

(C/NF) Since the mid-1960s, Li Desheng has made a career of being on the right side of every political movement, and his

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career has prospered. He established his reputation in Beijing by "supporting the left" in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, rising to the Politburo in 1969. As Director of the PLA General Political Department (GPD) during the early 1970s, Li helped Mao limit the fallout from Lin Biao's alleged attempted coup and was rewarded by promotion to the Politburo's elite standing committee. Seeing the coming danger from the fight for Mao's succession between the Gang of Four and Deng, Li reportedly asked to be relieved as GPD Director and to be demoted from the standing committee to mere full membership on the Politburo.

(C/NP) After Deng's rehabilitation, Li consistently parroted the Deng line, often taking the point for Deng on such controversial reform issues as remnant leftism in the PLA. Despite this and Li's revolutionary war ties with Deng, however, Deng apparently has never fully trusted Li and was believed to have wanted him to relinquish his regional command and retire to Beijing where his activities could be monitored.

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